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RAISING BADGERS IN CAPTIVITY

Prepared in Section of Fur Resources, Division of Wildlife Research

The active demand for serviceable pelts of all kinds and the good prices received for badger skins have resulted in many attempts to raise badgers in captivity. The cost of so producing these skins, however, exceeds the returns from their sale. Badger raising is still in its infancy and little as yet can be predicted as to its future. Fur farmers engaged in the experiments say that the animals stand pen conditions satisfactorily.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The badger is one of the larger members of the weasel family. It has a broad, heavy body and a short, muscular neck. Its head is rather small and pointed, and the ears are small and rounded. The forelegs are short, powerful, and well developed, with claws more than an inch in length and well adapted to burrowing. The hind legs are small and the claws short.

The fur on the back varies from light to dark silvery buff-gray. This blends to a yellowish white on the under side of the body. The head and neck are marked with a white stripe on top, and white patches appear below the eyes and on the ears. The hair is longest on the sides of the body. Primeness of the pelts varies somewhat, but they are usually in best condition from the latter part of December to the middle of March.

PENS AND DENS

Several kinds of pens and dens can be used for raising badgers. While no definite plan of construction has been devised, certain fundamental rules should be observed. Sufficient space should be given for exercise, and the enclosure should be so made as to keep the animals

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NOTE: This leaflet supersedes Wildlife Research and Management Leaflet BS-32 issued by the Bureau of Biological Survey under the Department of Agriculture in January 1936.

from escaping. The floor should be either of concrete or of earth covered with heavy woven wire, such as that used for the sides, so as to prevent burrowing out. The den should be well ventilated and may be either above or below the surface of the ground. The pens should be on well-drained soil, with both shade and sunlight.

FEEDING

Badgers in the wild subsist largely on ground squirrels and other small animals. In captivity their food may consist of a mixture of cereals, milk, eggs, and meat. The definite quantity of food required has not been determined, but it is usually safe to give as much as the animals will readily clean up. The ration used on most fox farms appears to be suitable. Feeding only once daily is satisfactory. In cold climates more food is usually required prior to hibernation than at other times.

BREEDING

There is a conflict of testimony as to the time of breeding. Some have asserted that it is in fall, others that it occurs during March and April. The breeding season and the length of the gestation period will remain in doubt until further series of experiments and observations have been made. It is known, however, that only one litter a year is produced, usually in May or June. The number in the litter may vary from one to seven, though it probably averages about four.